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Transnational divorce and remarriage between Pakistan and Britain: Intersectionality, harmful immigration rules and internal racism

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Abstract

This paper examines marital instabilities in the transnational social field connecting Pakistan and Britain, distinguishing between first marriages and remarriages. In British Pakistani families, national statistics show transnational marriage to be the dominant practice, although there is significant differentiation in its popularity. I show that in their remarriages, participants reevaluate the merits of transnational marriage, based on their experience of their unsuccessful first marriage. Despite considerable ambivalence towards cross-border marriage, remarriage continues to be a channel for marriage migration because British nationality, citizenship and permanent settlement status can raise a participant's marital capital in a transnational social field, mitigating the devalued identity associated with divorce. Overall, the material raises concerns about internal racial discrimination and the harmful immigration policies that enable and support such processes. I show the necessity of adopting a combined intersectional and transnational approach to the study of transnational divorce.

KEYWORDS

British Pakistani, immigration rules, internal racism, intersectionality, remarriage, transnationalism

1 | INTRODUCTION

Zulfi was 37 years old when I met him for an interview at a fast food restaurant in East London. Deploying a dry wit, he described his marital status as 'Nomadic divorcing bloke'. At college, Zulfi had studied sociology, and you could tell. He was uncomfortable with terms like arranged marriage and love marriage, seeing them as clichés. Making quote marks in the air, he described his first marriage as more on the latter line, but this side of his divorce—although he had met 'a few potentials' off his own initiative—he was toying with the

idea of an arranged marriage. It was Zulfi who used the term 'marriage market' to describe his situation as a divorcee facing remarriage:

I was speaking to my dad the other day, I said, 'Look, dad, when I'm ready don't bother looking for a rishta (match, proposal) for me'. He said, 'Why's that?' I said, 'Dad, what it is, when you're putting me out on the market ...' because that's how it is with the arranged marriage scenario ... I said to my dad, 'I'm not trying to be rude, yeah ... I'll look myself.' And do you know why I said that to him? I said to him, 'Look, you're telling these Asians who you're looking for a potential for me, first of all I'm a 37-year-old guy and a divorcee' which,

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you know, like on a pecking order ... [Laughter] Already divorced with two kids, yeah? So already you're coming down a few notches. Unfortunately, just like, being a single parent, you know, you're less than a bachelor girl. That's the reality. Does that make sense what I'm trying to say?

Kaveri: In the market.

In the market, that's the point I'm trying to make, it's a marriage market.

In this excerpt, Zulfi weighs up his prospects in the 'marriage market'—a term encapsulating the assessment of various forms of capital that may affect the prospects of a potential spouse—and does not like what he sees. As a man in his late 30s, and a divorcee with children from his previous marriage, he does not fancy the chances of his family finding him a good match in an arranged marriage. With self-deprecatory humour, he recognises his low ranking in the 'pecking order'. Nevertheless, he anticipates that he probably would, eventually, entertain a proposal from Pakistan. As much as divorcees go 'down a few notches' in the game, he felt confident that, as a man, there was always the option of marrying a second time in Pakistan. Referring to the then recent 2012 legislation introduced by the Coalition government, which restricted marriage migration by introducing a minimum income requirement of £18,600 for sponsors of immigrant spouses, he said:

Now I'm thinking I've only got one way to get back into the game [chuckles] and eventually the Tory Party's gonna stop that, am I making sense? So this is what it boils down to.

A lot of the guys, no matter what age they are, it's ok for them, they go 'back home' and get one. And generally the girls are marriageable age, so the age of 21 to 25. Ok, some of them probably lie about their age a little bit, but the guys, even at my age, they'd go and get one. That's the unfair world we live in. And I think this is the point we've got to address here, that it's an unfair world we live in.

In this paper, I examine the 'marriagescapes' (Constable, 2005) in the dense transnational social field (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004) connecting the United Kingdom and Pakistan, in which cross-border marriages continue to be extremely prominent, even if their popularity may not be unanimous. Transnational marriages have been said to be unstable, 'conflicting views caus[ing] severe challenges' (Groes & Fernandez, 2018: 9). Here, I show that divorce may alter considerations of transnational marriage in complex ways. In remarriages, we see people making different calculations about the merits of marrying 'here' or 'there', in ways that are informed by the experience of their own unsuccessful first marriages. Second, as Zulfi identifies above, divorce engenders

a gendered devaluation of identity, a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 1963) which may be circumvented by family networks stretched across borders, which expand the field of potential marriage partners. In spite of the identity stain of divorce, however, some individuals—specifically migrants—may in other ways inhabit a more powerful position in the 'marriage market' in their remarriages, if they were able to acquire permanent settlement during their first marriage. As this implies, there is a need to approach transnational divorce and remarriage through theories of intersectional feminism, which offers crucial insights to how the exercise of power may depend on the interlocking and intersecting of social locations.

In what follows, I attempt to develop Zulfi's conclusion that 'it's an unfair world we live in' by joining recent voices extending intersectional analyses to the transnational scale. Research on transnationalism has long been concerned with gender as an aspect of social location. Mahler and Pessar's (2001) framework of 'gendered geographies of power' explicitly grappled with gendered agency across a range of geosocial scales, from the local to the transnational, and their focus on social location showed marked affinities with intersectional feminism. This critique, beginning among Black feminists in the United States, argued that women's experiences of their gender cannot be separated from gender's intersections with, race/ethnicity, class and other systems of oppression and that these multiple aspects of identity may interlock and combine in individuals in ways that give or deny power (Crenshaw, 1991). More recently, Purkayastha (2012) and Patil (2013) have highlighted the need for intersectional feminism to attend to cross-border dynamics, and in the context of family life, Mahler, Chaudhuri, and Patil (2015) have shown how the intersections of gendered power shift when our analysis moves between intimate, local and transnational scales. Building on this conversation, Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki (2017) have sought to theorise generation more robustly as a relational concept imbued with power, as an axis of differentiation between first-generation migrants and the so-called second generations, that needs to be more widely examined in intersectional analyses.

This paper takes up this productive direction of thinking and, like other contributions in this special issue, examines the particular contexts of gendered power associated with divorce in a transnational social field. Unlike other contributions, I focus on remarriage—an issue submerged until recently in discussions of divorce, but one Grover (2014: 329) argues to be an 'important site for feminist intervention and further debate' in which 'much still remains to be understood about gendered choices, desires and subjectivities'. Augmenting our understandings of remarriage, I suggest that gendered power in remarriages is contingent to intersectional influences on marital capital. Further, I highlight that these are not stable across the United Kingdom and Pakistan, or across generations, and that racialised hierarchies of nationality and citizenship may also be traversed through a marital history. I will now detail key aspects of the research context to this study of remarriage.

2 | BRITISH PAKISTANI TRANSNATIONAL MARRIAGES, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Public and policy debates in the United Kingdom have increasingly pathologised transnational marriage, particularly from South Asia, the largest regional source of spousal immigration (Charsley, Bolognani, Ersanilli, & Spencer, 2020: 8). In keeping with policies restricting transnational marriages across Europe (Bonjour & Block, 2016), U.K. governments have increasingly discouraged British South Asians from entering into transnational marriages, arguing that they create 'greater levels of patriarchal control or uneven balances of power in a relationship; the acceptance of "home country" norms in terms of both domestic abuse and a woman's role in the home; [and] insular communities that deal with problems internally and [are] less likely to engage with services or mix with others' (Casey, 2016: 108).

This governmental concern over women's low position in transnational marriages is more than a little galling, as domestic violence scholars claim that these negative policy representations have enabled immigration legislation that has *actually created* the conditions for abuse of immigrant spouses. In 2012, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government introduced the legislation to which Zulfi referred above, which sought to restrict marriage migration by raising the required level of English, introducing a minimum income requirement of £18,600 for sponsors of immigrant spouses, and extending the probationary period before spouses could apply for permanent settlement, formerly from two, to now 5 years. This increase in the duration of the probationary visa was in spite of trenchant protest by South Asian feminist organisations, which have argued that probationary visa rules make migrant spouses systematically vulnerable to the threat of deportation should they exit an abusive marriage before becoming eligible for permanent settlement, whilst the No Recourse to Public Funds rule denied them access to social security and welfare support in resisting or escaping abuse (Anitha, 2011; Sharma & Gill, 2010). Concerted campaigning led to the introduction of a Domestic Violence Rule, entitling spousal migrants facing domestic abuse to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain before the end of their probationary visa, and without the endorsement of their spouse; and to a new Destitution Domestic Violence Concession, entitling such claimants to 3 months of access to public funds whilst their application for settlement in the United Kingdom is considered. However, the burden of proof for migrant spouses applying for the Domestic Violence Rule remains forbiddingly high, and 3 months of financial support woefully inadequate, leading Mirza (2016) to explicitly name these immigration rules as 'harmful'. Furthermore, these rules apply only to those who arrive in the United Kingdom on spousal visas, omitting the significant numbers of abused migrants who have other types of visas with the No Recourse to Public Fund condition (Southall Black Sisters, 2020).

From the perspective of immigration law and public policy, therefore, transnational marriages have been increasingly demonised. For the British Pakistani families with whom I worked, however, perspectives on transnational marriage are more complex. Statistics based on survey data show that transnational marriage continues to be the predominant form of marital alliance among British Pakistani Muslims.

Between 2004 and 2018, some 53% of British-born Pakistani Muslim spouses were married to a coethnic from Pakistan, 37% of men and 40% of women were married to a coethnic from the United Kingdom, and 9% of men and 7% of women were married to someone from a different ethnic group (Charsley, Bolognani, Ersanilli, & Spencer, 2020: 89): these statistics do not, it should be noted, distinguish between first marriages and remarriages. For men, there has been a downward trend in transnational marriage over time, with much higher proportions of those born in the 1950s and 1960s married transnationally than those born in the 1970s and 1980s; this pattern is not seen straightforwardly among women (90). There are gender differences, too, in the associations between education and transnational marriage. For men, lower levels of education are associated with higher levels of transnational marriage. For women, it is those with secondary school qualifications who are more likely to be in a transnational marriage than either those without qualifications or those with postsecondary education—a difference Charsley et al. suggest may relate to the difficulties, for women, of meeting financial requirements for sponsoring the immigration of a spouse for those with low levels of education (96, 100).

This differentiation in the popularity of transnational marriages is also reflected in equivocal stereotypes about migrant spouses from Pakistan among British-born Pakistanis, which Charsley and Bolognani (2017: 50) have recently brought to light. In this important work, they problematize British-born participants' use of the term 'freshie', to describe recent immigrants from Pakistan, as an 'internalization of colonial racial/ethnic hierarchies'. Sociological literature has widely interpreted the use of racial slurs such as 'Fresh Off the Boat' as a form of internal racism or intra-ethnic othering, reflecting the negotiation of local hierarchies of belonging (McAuliffe, 2008; Phoenix, 2011; Pyke & Dang, 2003). However, among British Pakistanis, for whom transnational migration remains so prominent, it is intriguing that depictions of 'freshies' overlap to a very large degree with those of the *mangetar*, a Punjabi and Urdu term meaning fiancé/e, as a synonym which Charsley and Bolognani (2017: 56) say shares 'the lack of [cultural] capital of the freshie, but [is] also characterised by a lack of domestic gendered power'. These negative evaluations of the 'freshie' and *mangetar* point to pervasive ambivalences about transnational marriage as a channel for continued migration.

As Charsley's (2013) earlier work has shown, transnational marriages have complex economic, cultural and emotional underpinnings, amongst which are the hopes of many parents and participants that a transnational marriage will reduce the risk of marriage breakdown by ensuring continued commitment to shared religious, marital and family values. Yet such discussions jar with expressions of concern about transnational marriages in terms of disjunctive conjugal expectations, as reflected in the small academic literature on divorce or lone parenthood among British Asians, which identifies 'incompatibility' in marriages involving transnational migration as a prominent cause of marital breakdown alongside a set of culturally particular instabilities connected to traditions of arranged marriage and wider family involvement (see, e.g., Bano, 2012; Das, 2011). Statistics based on survey data indicate that, compared to 4% in the mid-1990s, by 2010–13, 10% of ever-married Pakistani Muslims were currently separated or

divorced—an underestimate of the full extent of divorce because it excludes those who have remarried, whose marital status would be denoted as currently married (Qureshi, 2016: 3–5). Amid this increased prevalence of divorce, there are signs of wider reevaluation of the stability of transnational and arranged marriage. In my study of British South Asian divorces, I have documented some distinctive instabilities of transnational marriages, within a broader landscape of marital discontent. Transnational marriages generated conflicts over disjunctive conjugal expectations, forming a cluster within a broader set of conflicts concerning a lack of intimacies (Qureshi, 2016: 85–94). Transnational marriages engendered economic conflicts associated with responsibilities to remit money to kin in Pakistan, or husbands' inability to embody masculine breadwinning expectations—associated with low earnings due to downward social mobility—forming a cluster within a broader landscape of marital conflicts over finances and economic abuse (73–9). Immigration insecurity during the probationary spouse visa rendered migrant spouses unable to exit abusive marriages because of immigration insecurities and economic precarity; conversely, British-born women married to Pakistani nationals described the endorsement of their spouse's Indefinite Leave to Remain as a point of coercive control (79–85). Such conflicts formed part of a broader cluster of divorce narratives concerning refusal to domestic control. In the wake of such marital breakdowns, some participants, and their parents, express misgivings about transnational marriages.

Alongside these negative evaluations of transnational marriage, however, are the workings of remarriage 'markets'. There is some degree of a devaluation of identity associated with divorced status. Further, this devaluation intersects with gender identity in complex ways, reflected in statistics showing that the percentages reporting separated or divorced status are dramatically higher for ever-married women than men, and thus, that men are more likely to remarry (Qureshi, 2016: 216–7). As suggested by the quotes from Zulfi, this is partly because of the tendency for women to be the primary caregivers for any children resulting from a first marriage, but it is also because presumed sexual experience detracts more for a woman than for a man (Qureshi, 2016: 224). Although my wider study suggests that the stigma of divorce is attenuating, with divorced women and men both being encouraged by their natal families to remarry (Qureshi, 2016: 245–61), it also raises further questions about how the stigma of divorce may intersect with other aspects of social location.

This intersecting of stigma is not well captured by Goffman's (1963: 9) classic theory of stigma as the process of an identity becoming 'disqualified from full social acceptance'. As Tyler (2018) has recently argued, Goffman's analysis of stigma has limited application to intersectional analyses, due to his deliberate bracketing off of economic and political structures—specifically, the violent regimes of racial stigma that were being challenged during Goffman's career. In the existing literature, there are some suggestions that the stigma associated with divorce may be contingent, in the transnational social field, to racialised citizenship and nationality status. For example, although noting that participants 'generally did not provide critical assessments of their own or their spouse's marital capital', Charsley, Bolognani, Ersanilli, and Spencer (2020), point to 'hints of issues which

might have hindered the British partners' chances of a "good match" in the UK' in some of the transnational marriages they encountered, including limited education or employment prospects, and also troubled reputations, health conditions or divorced status, especially for women (p.103). Conversely, Mirza (2016: 599–600) documents how for migrant women the stigma of a failed first marriage may recede and give way to even respect once they acquire Indefinite Leave to Remain: 'everyone respected me there [in Pakistan] only because I have a visa'; 'whenever anyone hears that I have a visa they come and ask for my hand in marriage'. In what follows, I therefore develop an intersectional analysis taking into consideration the ways in which divorced status may interact with gender differently at multiple geosocial scales, over different generations, and over an individual's migration and settlement history.

3 | RESEARCH SETTING AND METHODS

Between 2012 and 14, I undertook an ethnographic study of marital breakdown in working class Pakistani Muslim families in East London and Peterborough. Both are localities with significant populations of people of Pakistani Muslim heritage, and both have been described as 'super-diverse' (Erel, 2011; Vertovec, 2007), with ongoing immigration from Pakistan through asylum, student and irregular routes combined with continued marriage migration channelled to established families, which has diversified population and generational structures. The ethnic category of British Pakistani Muslim masks significant power and status distinctions between individuals who are socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified—a strong motivation for adopting an intersectional lens.

The study involved interviews with 74 participants who had experienced marital breakdown: 51 women and 23 men. I recruited these participants to the study through residential fieldwork, and with the help of Shareen Akhtar, who worked as a community research facilitator and introduced me to half of the study participants and attended four interviews. I recruited the other half of the informants myself, through snowballing and returning to others whom I had come to know during earlier research in 2005–2007 and 2011. I am identified as White British, which led to complex permutations of connection and disconnection with the study participants. Despite being a racial/ethnic outsider, I was in other ways connected intimately to the study participants because of the extent to which I cared about their stories of marital breakdown. My female gendering no doubt contributed to the rapport I was able to develop and to participants' acceptance of my attentive listening as a form of care.

The 74 participants generated a corpus of narratives about 116 marriages, of which the majority were what I will describe for the purposes of this paper as transnational: marriages involving one person who was British-born and raised, and one person who was Pakistan-born (71 marriages). The rest were either between two people who were Pakistan-born, either because both spouses had already married in Pakistan prior to their migration, or because a migrant from Pakistan had remarried to someone in or from Pakistan (23 marriages); or

between two British-born spouses (22 marriages; this latter category included the majority of the inter-ethnic marriages in the study¹). The strong profile of marriage migration in the study does not reflect the national statistics on the prevalence of transnational marriage, noted above, but rather, the highly migratory character of the two localities.

In this paper, I focus on the subset of the participants who had divorced or separated from their first marriage (52 of the 74 informants in the wider study) and within that, on those divorced informants who had subsequently remarried (30 informants). I have compared across the various remarriage trajectories—whether the transnational form of the first marriage was repeated in the remarriage, or reversed—and analysed the reasonings that participants described for remarrying 'here' or 'there'.

3.1 | The reevaluation of transnational marriages

There were 10 remarried informants who repeated the transnational form of their first marriage in their remarriage. They had often exited first marriages involving the set of marital conflicts associated with transnational marriages, which I outlined above (Qureshi, 2016: 73–95). However, this does not mean they were unambiguous about the merits of transnational marriage, and their interviews often describe reevaluation of the wisdom of marrying 'there' in the context of a remarriage.

British-born Afshan is a case in point. When I first interviewed her, Afshan, aged 23, was already a divorced mother with daughters aged five and seven. Whilst studies argue that consent and coercion in relation to marriage are not binaries but two ends of a continuum, between which lie degrees of expectation, persuasion, pressure and threat (Anitha & Gill, 2009), Afshan herself characterised her first marriage—aged 15, to a paternal cousin in Pakistan—as very unambiguously forced. Showing the workings of 'everyday bordering' (Wemyss, Yuval-Davis, & Cassidy, 2018)—where state borders move from the margins of people's lives, encountered just at airports, to become part of everyday experience—Afshan depicted the marriage as an archetypical 'sham marriage', where she first took the marriage to be 'genuine', but the very moment her husband got his Indefinite Leave to Remain, 'he just changed'. Narratives of physical violence and psychological abuse, directed at her and their two daughters, followed. Later, she revealed details that might allow us to interpret this abuse in light of migratory challenges to her husband's masculinity (Charsley, 2013), talking, for example, about her husband's involvement in Afshan's father's family business and—after the business was bankrupted—their financial pressures and the emotional demands on them as a couple living at Afshan's parents' house.

When I interviewed Afshan in 2005, she had been divorced for 2 years and was contemplating remarriage. By 2007, she had remarried and was 4 months pregnant with the first baby through her second marriage. Her husband was from Pakistan, and still there, waiting for his spouse visa. The match had been set up through Afshan's brother's wife, who was a migrant from Pakistan. Afshan's second husband was educated to masters level and worked as an IT

professional. This was his first marriage. He now stood to immigrate to the United Kingdom, but he had not seemingly been searching for a British-based proposal, and according to Afshan, he was well settled in the IT sector, had good prospects in Pakistan and was ambivalent about the move. Although Afshan depicted her second husband as sanguine about migration to the United Kingdom, unlike her first husband, she remained very cautious about the risks of entering into another transnational marriage. She therefore sought to protect herself and her daughters through a prenuptial agreement with her new husband, in which he had committed to provide financially. She had made it explicit that the flat she had salvaged from her divorce would remain solely in her name, even if her second husband would be paying the mortgage. As she said,

I'm gonna make my husband work. He's going to pay me. Pay all the repayments.

It's not like I've haven't spoken to him about it, I've spoken to him I've explained it to him, I've explained my situation to him and I've said at first, before the wedding, before we had the ceremony I did say to him I said, 'if you want to come to London, if it's only for a visa I can call you as a student. I can help you get to London. But I don't want you to play with my feelings'. And he said 'No, it's nothing like that'. He said, to me 'you can come and live in Pakistan with the kids', but I did stay in Pakistan for a few months and I find it quite hard there. I don't like living there.

She was supported in all this by her older brother and her mother, who I interviewed too, who was also deeply anxious about the prospect of her new son-in-law being insincere and interested in Afshan 'just for the visa'. This example shows the extent to which Afshan and her family were trying to minimise the risks that they associated with another transnational union. These risks, furthermore, were highly gendered, as though both migrant men and women stand to benefit from marriage to a British-born person in the form of a fiancé or spouse visa, the public archetype of the 'sham' marriage of convenience is of extractive 'bogus husbands' misleading vulnerable, innocent British women (Wray, 2015). The same is seen in British-born Rani's interview, where her first marriage—to a cousin from Mirpur—broke down amid financial acrimony associated with his remitting money to his parents. After the divorce and some ten years spent as a single mother, Rani made the decision to marry a migrant student, a bachelor whom she met via a 'halal dating' scheme organised by her university's Islamic Society². This caused great conflict, as her parents were unwilling to let her be 'taken advantage of' by a man they presumed to be motivated primarily by his need for a U.K. visa:

It was a real conflict negotiation, but dad came round in the end. The local Imam got in touch and said, 'Look, what's your problem?' And dad said what he said and he [the Imam] goes, 'Look, I understand you have

concerns. He doesn't have a permanent visa, so you're concerned that your daughter's going to be taken advantage of as in the previous marriage. I understand that, but you know, they want to do the halal thing at the end of the day and you're just going to have to see what's going to happen.' Anyway, we didn't arrange any wedding until dad gave us the OK.

Whilst these participants repeated the transnational form in their remarriages, therefore, their first marriages had led to such misgivings about the risks of marrying in Pakistan that we can see these marriages happening in spite of reservations, on behalf of the individual participant, or by others in their natal families. Such misgivings were also seen in the interviews with participants who had first transnational marriages followed by a remarriage with a British-born spouse, as I now discuss.

3.2 | Considered preference for a British-born spouse

Like Afshan above, British-born 30 year old Najma characterised her first marriage, to a cousin from Mirpur, as unambiguously forced. Nonetheless, she insisted that she had strived to make her transnational marriage work. She described her embarrassment and physical revulsion at his habits, singling out his consumption of chewing *niswaak* bark, to clean his teeth, as particularly unpleasant:

I was 21 now and he was here, we're like a married couple. And then I used to walk down the street and see a guy and a girl holding hands and I used to look at them and think that's genuine, this isn't. And he was quite embarrassing 'cause they classed him as a freshie and I found him quite embarrassing 'cause ... his habits, he'd take the *niswaak*, you know what *niswaak* is? He used to take that and just spit, and he was just not hygienic. Seriously, and that was a big off put. And I'm not being big-headed or anything, I used to wanna walk with someone that I feel comfortable walking with, you know, someone more on my level. I tried so much to groom him and make him look nice, bought him loads of designer clothes and stuff but he just wouldn't hold it and it was just the way he was. And I just felt it wasn't fair on him either, me trying to mould him into something he wasn't.

Taken on its own, this quote smacks of a deep internal racism. It chimes with Charsley and Bolognani's (2017) study, where tropes of disgust and bodily revulsion proved to be very prominent in stereotypical depictions of 'freshies' and *mangetars*. Najma's interview went on to allow us to read this in even more complex ways, as her objection to her first husband went beyond his dress sense and use of *niswaak* to brush his teeth. While she was the one with the cultural capitals and

privileges of British nationality, he was the one who exercised economic control in the marriage. He was possessive, and sexually possessive, even forceful—showing how an intersectional analysis of power must proceed simultaneously across different social domains, and how multiple social locations may ascribe and deny power in different situations. The second time round, Najma married a former boyfriend from college, who was also exiting an unsuccessful transnational marriage.

The interview with British-born Munir took similar contours, in that he followed an arranged transnational marriage with a love marriage to a British-born woman—a British Indian Sikh divorcee, as Munir's remarriage was one of the inter-ethnic remarriages in the study.¹ His first marriage was with a maternal cousin in Pakistan. He emphasised his lack of say over the match and how it had been his mother's wish. He said he'd genuinely persevered with the marriage and been committed, but

She came over at a very young age, she was 3–4 years younger than me. Our family kept her back, she never went to school. Couldn't speak English.³ She went through that traditional education, you know, Urdu, Arabic, namaz (praying), roza (fasting).

From the very start, it didn't work. There was nothing in common, no chemistry.

Narratives followed about his first wife's frustration with him, and his with her, and of the involvement of her natal kin in picking up the pieces after their increasingly forceful arguments.

I'd had a very promiscuous life, before my marriage as well, she knew very well about it. When we were together, it was arguments, fighting, no communication, hardly any communication. When we did, it was all bad—it was all my fault and she'd go back to her mum's. I'd be the one to go and fetch her back.

Unpacking these conflicts, Munir chuckled as he intimated to the underlying sexual dynamics:

I think the underlying problem was sexual really. I was active and she wasn't. I was overactive! [Chuckles] and that's important! That, for me, was the thing that was tearing me apart.

We're still together, even now, on paper. I'm very loyal, loyalty for me, is very important. She's still the mother of my three kids. We're still married. But I just happened to meet somebody. Accident really. Likeminded. I started seeing her, I got into her and she got into me.

This was different. This was a meeting of mind and heart, and she was – available! I just went for it, regardless.

Munir's interview exemplifies the 'reinvention' of polygamy, as Charsley and Liversage (2013) have observed, as a way for men to meet their 'dual aspirations': they can secure parental approval for their first, arranged marriage, as well as their personal desires for emotional and sexual intimacy through their second marriage. Najma's interview above, and Rani's, suggest that divorce and remarriage may do the same for women. The first marriage might allow them to fulfil parental hopes for an arranged marriage, but then, if the marriage does not work out, they could remarry the second time round with a greater degree of personal say, first choosing their spouse themselves and inviting their families to vet their chosen spouse and give approval afterwards (Qureshi, 2016: 254–61). It is important to note the kinds of representations of the Pakistan-born spouse that these narratives perform, creating the figure of the 'freshie' as unscrupulous, venal, selfish, even abusive with finances; physically repulsive; and sexually deviant: sexually controlling and forceful, in Najma's case, or inhibited, in Munir's. Later, I will explore ways in which marriage migrants developed reciprocal stereotypes.

3.3 | A transnational remarriage to expand the net

This section addresses cases showing the reverse pattern, whereby first marriages between two British-born spouses were followed by transnational marriages. Zulfi's analysis, in the opening vignette, of the global geosocial inequalities that enable those with limited marital capital locally in the United Kingdom to remarry in Pakistan is exemplified by the three cases in my study where participants followed a first marriage between two British-born spouses with a transnational remarriage. Significantly, two of these cases concerned transnational remarriages which allowed a British-born partner to remarry in spite of reputational concerns. In the first case, Shoaib, 30 years old, had exited a first arranged marriage to a British-born cousin that did not work out. His first wife had continued to see her boyfriend from college, and Shoaib had spent several years in prison after violently attacking his rival. After he was released from prison, his parents began searching for a proposal for remarriage among the family in Mirpur. But, he explained, they were thwarted in this endeavour by 'jealous relatives' who sabotaged potential *rishte* (proposals) by letting out the secret of Shoaib's prison sentence. His parents searched long and far for a family unaware of the prison sentence, and eventually found the family of Samina, an unmarried woman from a different province of Pakistan altogether.

Before Samina's family finally agreed, there was three other girls that said 'yes', the families said 'yes' but then they turned us down, because information was being passed from here over there, through this middle-man, and he was telling them 'look, he's been to prison, he's a bad guy, he's this he's that, these people are like, very bad people', things like that ... We finally found out, you know, what was happening, but I did eventually find a family.

In the second such case, now 54-year old Razzaq had remarried to Haseena, an unmarried cousin in Pakistan, following his divorce from a British-born woman, prompted by his development of florid psychosis. Razzaq's family had hidden this information from Haseena's family throughout the marriage negotiations; she only found out when she was 8 months pregnant with their first child.

He was married before, he's got a wife and kids. I think he was ill, and that's why his wife left him, because when he started like that and she couldn't handle it. So then his mum and dad went back home a little while later [to look for proposals]. We never knew about this illness he got. In my family, nobody knew. I found out when my son was born, that he's ill, he's taking medication.

Returning to the question of how British citizenship and nationality inflects marital capital, it is not insignificant that these transnational remarriages happened with unmarried, younger women from Pakistan. Studies of intra-national, cross-regional patri-virilocal marriages (for example Davin, 2008 on China) have also observed that long-distance marriages can enable deception to take place, and draw out the gendered dimensions whereby such marriages are sustained by migrant brides for whom return to natal kin is particularly difficult. The final section now turns to cases of former migrant spouses remarrying a migrant in or from Pakistan, where we see these inequalities of nationality and citizenship reknitting after migrant spouses acquire Indefinite Leave to Remain.

3.4 | How things change after permanent settlement

As Mirza (2016) has observed, for a migrant spouse exiting a transnational marriage, with permanent settlement acquired, remarrying in Pakistan could allow them to try and renegotiate the power dynamics of the marriage. This was notable in interviews with migrant men, who often described how a negative experience of marriage to a British-born woman had led them to hope that a Pakistani national might be comelier and more committed to marriage. Thirty-nine-year-old Shakoor arrived in the United Kingdom in 1995 to marry a paternal cousin who was British-born. His analysis of the breakdown of the marriage centred on the idea of British-born women being brought up without discipline, over-involved with their friends and insufficiently enveloped in the home. He dismissed the marriage as loveless, a *ravaiati shaadi* (traditional marriage) undermined by his wife's inability to compromise;

When I came back from work my wife would not be at home. I used to ask her mother "where is she", she wasn't doing any job, she just used to go outside with her friends.

Elaborating wider negative characterizations about British-born women, Shakoor said '*yahan ka mahol azad hai* (the atmosphere here is very free)'. When it came to his second marriage, there was no question that he would marry another British-born woman. As he explained,

If a girl is from here and a boy is from Pakistan,
between them there is *zameen asmaan ka farq*
(the earth and sky of difference) in their mental level.

In the second time around, he had an arranged marriage to a never-married woman from outside his family and said he felt very fortunate that his second marriage had been successful. The stereotyping here is very palpable, further informing insights about processes of intra-ethnic othering but from the perspective of migrant spouses rather than British-born participants. Similar themes are echoed in 33 year old Afzal's interview. Afzal had arrived in the United Kingdom as an irregular migrant and married Kulsoom—also from Pakistan, but a divorcee who had been in the United Kingdom for 7 years after a brief and unsuccessful transnational marriage—out of a concern he described, quite explicitly, with securing lawful immigration status. He said he had always had reservations about marrying someone British:

After I came here and saw the condition of the girls,
the style of the girls here, my heart was saying that I
should marry in Pakistan.

The marriage broke down after 12 years, amid great acrimony. Over the course of my fieldwork, he remarried to a woman from his extended family in Pakistan whom he characterized as 'very nice', 'she can compromise'. Echoing Shakoor's sentiments almost word-for-word, Afzal told me,

Girls from over here, and girls from Pakistan, they are different like earth and sky. But when a girl comes from there to here, then some of them can change. And then they also do the same, what others from here are doing here, they develop the same attitude. It's not that they cultivate it in their mind, but their friends over here, they misguide them. They say to one another, when they are making a new friend, 'how long you are here? How long you are living here, and how is your husband?'. They all have the same recording. 'Ok then, this is your right and that is your right, now don't do this and that now, because you still have to wait for a visa. When you get a visa, then you can take your revenge (*jitnee badlee leeneen heen leen*), if your husband is *zalim* (cruel) and abuses you'.

Afzal also remarried in Pakistan, to an unmarried cousin, in the hope that she would share his mentality, be less assertive, more pliant and willing to compromise. As this implies, for a migrant spouse,

remarrying in Pakistan could allow them to gain power, across multiple domains, in their second marriage. This is suggested again by 26-year-old Nida, who was divorced from an abusive British-born husband. Nida's account of abuse at the hands of her in-laws was harrowing, but reflected broader themes. Her mother-in-law confiscated her passport and refused to allow her access to a phone or to calling cards that would allow her to speak to her parents in Pakistan. Her mother-in-law did nothing to stop her brother-in-law slapping her because, she told me, 'he can do whatever he wants with you because *ham ap ko khareed ke laeen hain* (we have purchased you)'. She was made to sleep on the kitchen floor with the dogs; she said her mother-in-law even instructed the grandchildren to spit in her food. When Nida finally told her father in Pakistan about her ill-treatment, he instructed her to put up with the abuse until she had her Indefinite Leave to Remain, but her in-laws never applied for it, instead making her to overstay her probationary spouse visa. After 6 years of marriage, and 2 years spent in the insecurity of living as a visa overstayer, Nida fled to a women's refuge and was supported in applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain under the Domestic Violence Rule (see Mirza, 2016). She was now contemplating remarriage to a relative in Pakistan because, as she put it, 'that way, if anything went wrong, at least he wouldn't make a problem'.

Nida's interview suggests that migrants from Pakistan may suffer the consequences of harmful immigration rules that enable domestic control and violence, but also, that once they acquire permanent settlement, they may sometimes seek to manoeuvre within the inequalities engendered by immigration status to try to protect themselves in their second marriages. This was exemplified in the case of Ruby, herself a migrant woman from Pakistan, who came to the United Kingdom through an arranged marriage at the age of 17 and exited the marriage, after 5 years, due to domestic violence. Fleeing to a women's refuge, she obtained Indefinite Leave to Remain through the Domestic Violence Rule. Two years after the divorce she remarried, to a bachelor from Pakistan, and in her second marriage, she negotiated the power dynamics very differently. Mindful of the possibility that he might leave her once he acquired his Indefinite Leave to Remain, she made him sell some land in Pakistan, to give her money as security for his visa application and travel expenses, and for a deposit for a house. After his then 2-year probationary spouse visa expired, she met with her local member of parliament and, telling him that she had doubts about her husband's genuine commitment to the marriage, she enlisted the MP's support in writing to the home office and requesting the probationary visa to be extended by another 2 years, rather than giving her husband Indefinite leave to remain.

I have documented other cases of British-born women using their husbands' dependence upon them for a visa as a way of shoring up their power in the marriage, including the use of this same strategy of enlisting their local MP to instruct the home office to extend the probationary spouse visa rather than supporting their spouses in applying for indefinite leave to remain (Qureshi, 2016: 263–4)—a process enabled by the home office's anticipation of 'sham marriages' (Wemyss, Yuval-Davis, & Cassidy, 2018; Wray, 2015). In this way, remarriage in Pakistan could be a means of self-protection after the

negative experience of their first marriage. However, it was an uncertain means of self-protection, as the fear was pronounced, that once their husband acquired permanent settlement it would reverse the dynamic. Further, for Ruby, as for other women I have described in my wider study (e.g., Qureshi, 2016: 265–6), this went on to become a source of domestic conflict, as she told me her second husband was psychologically abusing her over her refusal to endorse his Indefinite Leave to Remain.

4 | CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

My study finds that ambivalences concerning transnational marriages are honed through participants' experiences of their first marriages. Even in those cases where the transnational form of a first marriage is repeated in the remarriage, participants—and their natal families, who offer advice about potential spouses—express reluctance and concern at the risks it may entail. There is the opposite pattern too, where transnational first marriages are followed by intra-national remarriages, where participants express a desire to inch towards their ideal form of conjugal relationship by making a match very different from their first. Nonetheless, remarriages continue to be an important route for ongoing marriage migration, as remarriage in Pakistan seems to allow participants with British nationality and citizenship to circumvent the gendered devaluation of marital capital associated with divorce. Further, once they acquire permanent settlement, marriage migrants exiting from first transnational marriages seem to prefer to remarry another migrant, due to experiences of marital hardship that they attribute to internal racial discrimination and to the use of harmful immigration rules to exercise domestic control. They may even use the very same immigration rules to try to protect themselves in their second marriages, although this means of self-protection was uncertain.

U.K. immigration rules see and create migrant spouses as legal persons of dispensable and of questionable value. Up to the acquisition of indefinite leave to remain, the moment the marriage breaks down, a migrant spouse stands at risk of immigration removal, unless entitlement to exemption on the basis of the domestic violence rule can be proven. This devaluing of migrant spouses is reflected in the stereotypes developed by participants in transnational marriages, who may view their own fiancé or spouse as a 'freshie'. I have followed Charsley and Bolognani (2017) in examining the forms taken by, as well as the fact of intra-ethnic boundary-marking. Migrant spouses may be depicted as undesirable, unscrupulous, physically repulsive and sexually deviant—excessively controlling or inhibited. Charsley and Bolognani (2017) highlight the centrality of these tropes of sexual deviance and bodily disgust in British Pakistanis' negative stereotypes concerning 'freshies' and *mangetars*. They argue that these tropes make sense in the context of continued transnational marriage—which, defying any easy 'generational' boundary-making, shows 'the meeting of already unstable categories (British/Pakistani) in marital unions and as part of young British Pakistanis' negotiations of desirable marriage practices' (46). My study substantiates their call to

follow through the effects of these racial/ethnic hierarchies on transnational marriages. As they rightly say, 'the figure of the freshie does not operate at merely a symbolic level, or with respect only to processes affecting the British Pakistanis who employ it' (58). They draw on Tyler's (2013) critique of Kristeva-inspired discussions of the 'abject', quoting 'we should not ignore "what it means to be made abject, to be one who repeatedly finds herself the object of the other's violent objectifying disgust"' (Charsley & Bolognani, 2017: 58). In this paper, I have signalled what it might mean for migrants to be the object of their spouse's disgust. I have also outlined reciprocal forms of intra-ethnic othering that Pakistan-born migrant spouses may develop about British-born people. Here, as in the case of Singaporean nostalgia for the comely 'foreign bride' (Zhang & Yeoh, 2019), Louisa Schein's (1997: 73) analytic of 'internal orientalism' seems germane, stressing 'the adoption of Western orientalist logics and premises for self-representation in the course of Asian processes of identity production'. But as racism is defined by the power relations in which speakers are positioned, these reciprocal slurs concerning British-born Pakistanis have relatively lesser purchase over those whom they intend to denigrate. Further, in cases where Pakistan-born spouses themselves remarry in Pakistan, they may also recapitulate aspects of a racialised discourse about untrustworthy 'freshies' and *mangetars*. This reflects their renegotiation of power in their intimate lives, and suggests an irreducible ambivalence that persists about marriage migration, as a channel to immigration as well as to intimacy.

Gendered 'power geometries' (Mahler & Pessar, 2001) are suggested throughout the corpus of remarriages, yet the patterns of gendered agency are highly complex and shifting, depending on the interlocking and intersecting of social locations, differing over geosocial scales and in different domains. Male privilege may allow divorcees to remarry with greater ease (see Qureshi, 2016: 224), while British nationality, citizenship and permanent settlement status may raise a participant's marital capital in a transnational social field. My study demonstrates the necessity of a combined intersectional and transnational approaches in the study of divorce and remarriage in a 'diaspora space' (Brah, 1996) such as that connecting Britain and Pakistan. I extend the arguments of Fresnoza-Flot and Shinozaki (2017), who foreground generation as an axis of intersectional gendered power in transnational families. To this, I add that we need not only to examine distinctions by first-generation or second-generation status but also, how an individual may traverse between generational categories over the course of their migration and settlement history, inhabiting a different position in these racialised hierarchies of nationality and citizenship in their remarriage compared to their first.

Finally, this paper shows that it is crucial to build remarriage into an analysis of transnational 'marriagescapes' (Constable, 2005) and distinguish between the instabilities of first marriages and remarriages. I underline Grover's (2014) call for greater feminist attention to remarriage. As she argues, the existing scholarship has shown some unsubstantiated assumptions about divorce as an expression of the pursuit of intimate ideals, personal fulfilment and compatibility

(cf. Giddens, 1992). Largely, we have presumed that the freedom to remarry is liberating. In my study, I have shown some participants to be making bold choices in their remarriages, choosing their second spouses with a greater extent of personal say. Yet as in Grover's (2014) study of informal settlements in Delhi, second marriages do not necessarily offer happy endings, and may tend to reproduce the gender asymmetries of primary arranged marriages. The risks associated with remarriage remain strikingly gendered, even if gendered power is not stable but shifts across transnational and intersectional axes.

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NOTES

- ¹ Most of the interethnic marriages in the corpus were in fact remarriages (see Qureshi, 2016: 27).
- ² 'Halal dating' refers to forms of premarital/extramarital relationships which are deemed Islamically appropriate, namely, with other single Muslims who are interested in marriage, see Ahmad (2012).
- ³ As noted in the introduction, under the current immigration rules, such marriages are restricted due to the English language requirements imposed. Munir's first marriage took place in the late 1970s.

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